

783 Pierce College. It is hard for most Greeks, no matter how highly trained,
748 to bring into the social worker-client relationship an objectivity modeled
on the doctor-patient relationship. The Greek social worker finds it difficult
to think of the client as a case and almost immediately empathizes or
scolds in a way that would be considered quite unprofessional by American
standards. Psychiko, hardly the twentieth-century rationale for social
welfare, continues strong in Greece today, and the Bishop of Messenia is
doing much to keep it alive in his diocese, which seems much the better
for it.

THE PEASANT CONFRONTS DEATH

761 The peasant assumes that there is an afterlife and talks about doing kind
773 deeds "for the good of the soul." But these practical villagers do not talk
775 much about death, although they do have some fixed beliefs and prescribed
customs which stand them in good stead when confronting it. For example,
there is the matter of Charon who, according to the beliefs of ancient Rome,
was the boatman transporting the dead across the River Styx. I shall never
forget the sensation of riding along in the northern Peloponnesos between
Kleitoria and Kalavryta, enjoying the bright May afternoon, when my in-
terpreter pointed out a small and pleasant stream said to be the waters of
the Styx.¹⁷ Greek peasants do not assign the same role to Charon as did
the Romans, for they think of Charon as death itself, or as the angel of
death whom God sends down to bring back the soul of someone whose
time on earth has run its course. There are many songs and stories about
Charon, who is personified as one who wrestles with individuals for their
lives or who uses craft to draw the soul out of the body. From time to time
he is supposed to have displayed something akin to human sympathy:

God and Death: Once upon a time God sent death to reap a soul but when
death heard the lamentation of the relations and saw the beauty of the girl
whose soul he was supposed to reap, he felt sorry and returned to heaven with-
out accomplishing his mission. When God asked him why he didn't bring the
soul, death replied that he couldn't stand the crying and despair that he had
heard and seen. God got very angry and hit death so that he became deaf,
blind, and lame. He made him deaf so that he couldn't hear the crying, blind
so that he couldn't see whether the soul to be taken away belonged to an old
person or a child, and lame so that he could not run away from the place where
he was sent.¹⁸

761 Although church art, depicting the medieval Christian conception of
775 heaven and hell, has had some effect upon the view peasants take of "the
[772] next world," the people very often reveal a more basic belief in Hades as
"a common meeting-place of all whose lives are ended, without distinc-
tion of merit. Death is a deprivation of the joys of life, which, with all its
troubles and cares, is sweet. The old uneasy feeling that after death it is

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not well is ever present; and the dying man laments that he must see the sun no more, nor the light of the moon, the mountains, the shade of plane-trees, and the cool fountain because in Hades there breaks no dawn, and sings no bird, and no fountains of water flow."¹⁰

This same theme is brought out in the tradition which the villagers call the "water of forgetfulness."

Each person upon dying goes to the underworld. There he starts crying and is in despair because he died and had to leave the world which still seems so sweet to him. The other dead laugh at him. This happens for just one day because the other dead feel sorry for the newcomer, take him to a spring and tell him to drink some water. After he has had some he in his turn forgets the upper world and laughs at the newcomers who come later on. This happens to all who die.¹¹

When a person is believed to be dying, a candle is lit, probably so the soul will be sure to have some light as it moves into the other world. If any of this candle remains after a person dies, according to some village people, for three successive days you must put water in a little coffee cup and light the candle for ten minutes after sunset. You then take the water and throw it outside where nobody will be apt to walk on it. You also cut a narrow piece from the shroud and tie three knots in it, placing it in front of the icon. For three days you untie one of the knots and then sew the piece of cloth in the shirt of one of the male members of the family, who wears this piece until the shirt wears out. In the Naupaktos area, after a person dies all windows and doors are closed so death cannot get out. One person of the household shouts, "Death, leave the old man [or whoever is dead]." This is repeated many times in the hope that death can hear. It is done, the people say, to keep death from coming again to take someone else from that home.¹² Such shouting is not the custom in all parts of Greece, however.

What one does find quite generally in the rural areas, however, is the *myriologion*, or funeral dirge, which the women of the household and those from the neighborhood begin to sing as soon as death has come. Some of these have been conventionalized to the point that several women may all know the same dirge for a husband, child, or mother, and sing parts of it in turn rocking back and forth; in some parts of Greece the women improvise dirges in keeping with the prescribed musical form. These songs, sung in the house before burial, at the grave at stated intervals after death, or even as a woman is passing by the cemetery, may consist of questions put to the dead: "Why did you leave us?" "Why did you go so soon?" "How do you think the house can get on without you?"¹³ Those *myriologia* that have traditional content passed on from generation to generation are the source of many of the popular beliefs about the afterlife, and they illustrate as well as any aspect of Greek rural life the persistence of pre-Christian

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